

Proposal for an Alternative Academic Press

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Introduction

The following proposal is for an Alternative Academic Press. The intent of this initiative would be to increase the production of scholarly monographs, particularly in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, in order to advance scholarship in these areas. An additional goal of the initiative will be to develop a model for academic publishing that will be less expensive than traditional academic publishing and produce a product that will be open access in its electronic form and available at cost for a print-on-demand copy.

The proposal will be based on the principles of disruptive innovation developed by Clayton Christensen. The alternative academic press will not aim to compete with established academic presses (at least not initially), rather it will be an outlet for scholarship that would not otherwise be published. While the goal will be to create good works of scholarship, it is expected that standards of design and editorial review may be somewhat lower than traditional academic publishers. Peer review may be done in a different manner than traditional academic publishers, but it will not be sacrificed.

It is critical in this venture to understand that an attempt to create a new product, which this is, using traditional methods, will fail. Disruptive strategies cannot be crammed into traditional methods and in most cases traditional organizations will have values that will make the application of a disruptive strategy difficult if not impossible. In addition, the full value chain of the product needs to be new. Marketing, distribution, and preservation will need to be done through different channels than those of traditional academic publishing. For example academic libraries, which are critical to the value chain of traditional academic publishing will play little or no role in the value chain for the monographs produced in the new model.

Flipping the Model

The first thing that needs to be clearly understood about this venture is that it is not about selling books; it is about giving them away. In an open access world where the point of publication is to make a work freely available to the world, the reader is not the customer.

In the open access world the author is the customer. The author pays to have his or her work reviewed, edited, distributed, marketed, and preserved. The author, or the author's institution, is prepared to pay for this service because the publication will enhance the reputation of the author and her or his institution. The model proposed here is different from vanity publishing as it is generally understood because there is competition for the right to be published by the press. While this is true, we need also to recognize that in an open access world the markers for quality for works will often be determined after publication, and thus the vanity distinction is less clear and less important.

Because the author pays, the press needs to treat the author as the customer. This should lead to a focus on the best quality for the price and prompt service to the author. The press needs to deliver reputational value to authors that is commensurate with the investment they and their institution makes in the press and the publication process.

Assumptions/Principles

1. The author is the customer. No royalties will be provided, rather the author will benefit from the exposure of having their work published.
2. First copy costs are covered by the author or the author's institution.
3. Infrastructure costs are covered by membership fees.
4. If grant funds are raised they should be used to offset first copy costs not to reduce membership fees. External funding should not substitute for the institutional commitment membership demonstrates.
5. All electronic versions of published monographs will be open access. Print-on-demand versions will be provided at cost and outsourced to a print-on-demand company.
6. Quick turn-around on manuscripts is the norm.
7. Everything that can be outsourced will be outsourced. Fixed costs should be minimized.
8. The goal is to create more scholarly monographs. Always favor more content over special features. There may be opportunities for applying technology to create new forms of scholarship, but this focus especially early on in the project will be distracting and should be resisted.
9. Institutions will commit resources (cash and release time for faculty) to the project in order to contribute to scholarly publishing. Their incentive will be to

provide their faculty with the opportunity, which would otherwise not be available, to publish their work. From the institutional perspective contributions to the press will be a professional development expense.

10. The large pool of potential authors and the manuscript selection process will assure that the products of the press are not viewed as vanity publications.
11. The resources directed to the press may come at the expense of resources to library collections. This would be an appropriate trade-off.

Note on the term “Monograph”

The term “monograph” is here purposely used – in opposition to the term “book” – to indicate a difference from the standard university press title. The intent of this project is to publish long form scholarly arguments, but titles shorter than the traditional university press title may be appropriate. The length of the monograph would generally be from 75 to 300 pages. It is expected that appendices, either as links to external documents or as items attached to the text would be common.

The term also might convey the less sophisticated design of the work.

Membership

Membership fees will cover the fixed costs of the organization.

Any accredited not-for-profit higher educational institution is illegible to be a member of the Alternative Academic Press.

Members will pay a membership fee to the press of 0.2% of their library’s materials budget or \$2,000 which ever is more.

Only manuscripts whose authors have appointments at member institutions will be considered for publication.

Members will elect the press’s Board of Trustees and faculty from member institutions will make up the editorial committees that select manuscripts.

Governance

The press will be an independent 501-C-3.

Member institutions will elect the press's Board of Trustees. Voting will be proportional to the membership fee. An institution will have one vote for every \$2,000 in membership dues it pays.

Members of editorial committees will be selected by the Board of Trustees from among the faculty of the member institutions. Editorial committees will make final recommendations for manuscripts to be published.

In keeping with the low fixed cost principle, the staff of the press will be as small as possible.

Manuscripts

Manuscripts will be accepted from authors who have appointments at member institutions.

Each member institution may submit one manuscript per year for every \$2,000 in membership dues it pays. It is assumed that member institutions will have a review committee or similar mechanism to select manuscripts for submission. This will be the first level of peer review.

Editorial committees for various publishing programs or series will make recommendations for publication. Outside reviewers from member institutions may be used in the review process.

Special programs, for example for award winning Ph.D. dissertations from faculty at member institutions may be considered. See "The First Book Project" (at: <https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/490>) as an example of what might be done.

Another alternative program might be the short series. Annually one or more short series might be awarded. This program would provide an established scholar from one of the member institutions the opportunity to edit a series of three to five books produced by authors from member institutions. Selection would be competitive.

A program of author mentors might be put in place to provide new authors with a well-published scholar as a mentor in the publishing process.

Marketing, Distribution, and Preservation

Marketing will be to other scholars and will be done through web-based mechanisms. It might be outsourced. Reviews for the works will be sought, but it is assumed that the

most likely source of such reviews will be alternative channels such as academic blogs, etc.

As noted above distribution will be as open access for the electronic version of the works. Authors will maintain copyright and provide the press with a non-exclusive perpetual license to distribute the work. Print-on-demand will be made available from an outsourced provider.

The press will make a commitment to the long-term distribution and preservation of the work. This will be done through one or more external partners, for example DuraCloud, the HathiTrust, or the Internet Archive. The press in conjunction with its preservation partners will take responsibility for format migration.